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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM NewScope STATION WMAR-TV

DATE December 18, 1984 5:00 P.M. CITY Baltimore, Md.

SUBJECT SR-71 Spy Plane

NEWSWOMAN: The SR-71 spy plane, nicknamed the Blackbird, is the envy of the world of espionage. It's estimated that it can fly three 3000 miles an hour. A lot of other things about the Blackbird are only estimates because, as we see in the final part of our cover story series, the Air Force will only smile and say, "No comment."

WARRICK STERNS: The SR-71, the highest-flying, fastest spy plane in the world, the Air Force's supersecret pride and joy. The SR-71 and its more widely known partner, the U-2, are headquartered at Beale Air Force Base in Northern California. They are loaned out to world trouble spots, but no one will say exactly where they fly their highly classified missions.

Can you tell us where some of these missions have taken you to?

MAN: All over the world.

STERNS: All over the world.

MAN: Uh-huh.

STERNS: Can you list any countries you've flown over?

MAN: No.

STERNS: No.

The pictures are taken by special cameras developed for the high-flying jets, cameras similar to this early model. The pictures going to the highest level of the government, where only

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Presidents have unveiled their secrets.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: Nicaragua, right here, has become their base.

STERNS: So who orders such missions? The President? The CIA? The Joint Chiefs?

MAN: We don't know, in some cases, know where the requesting comes from. All we know is that our tasking comes, and we satisfy the tasking.

STERNS: The task usually involves getting a closer look at a trouble spot. Just how close of a look is possible? Can the cameras read the brand name on a package of cigarettes from above 80,000 feet? Well, that's the story we've all heard about the sophistication from time to time. But no one here at Beale Air Force Base will give the slightest hint as to whether or not that is true or false. And so you and I can only speculate on the detail from past pictures.

The task defined and the briefing done, the flight starts here with a hearty breakfast for the lengthy flight. Then it is suit-up time. They are literally dressed by several crewmen because the suits are heavy, difficult to put on, exhausting. Even their boots are laced up for them.

MAN: I could, but you'd be awful tired, you know, especially in the summertime when it's really hot and muggy.

STERNS: While ground crews ready the plane, another crew straps each into their seats. And minutes later engines are started and this supersecret aircrafat is on its way.

MAN: We do our missions daily around the world. [Unintelligible] very interesting information and it's exciting to be in on the ground level of what's happening around the world.

NEWSWOMAN: Now, the best guess is that there are about 20 or 30 of these planes in crews. But the Air Force is once again very secretive about what they cost.

NEWSWOMAN: That's some kind of plane.

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